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ABSTRACT

The Imaginitis Learning System is an integrated product development curriculum that is aimed at achieving stronger cooperation and conflict resolution skills among students who use it at elementary through adult education levels. It is a performance-based instruction product in which students learn to apply communication skills and work competencies in a real-life context. It attempts to offer authentic assessment as students are instructed on how to publish a book that becomes a portfolio exhibit of their learning. The developer, Imaginitis Interactive, requested that the Cooperative Learning Center at the University of Minnesota act as an independent outside evaluator to assess the impact of the Imaginitis system on the development of skills needed for cooperative learning and on the development of workplace competencies such as conflict resolution. "Teaching Students To Be Peacemakers" by D. and R. Johnson was the project learning framework. This report presents the results of an evaluation of the conflict resolution program in self-contained classrooms in the District of Columbia at grades 3/4, 7, and 11/12. At all levels of implementation and evaluation Imaginitis was determined to contribute to the development of conflict resolution skills. Statistically significant findings show that Imaginitis students develop a stronger ability to resolve conflicts in a nonviolent manner. (Contains two tables and six references.) (SLD)

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THE IMAGINITIS LEARNING SYSTEM CONFLICT RESOLUTION UNIT IN AN URBAN SCHOOL DISTRICT

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Abstract

Imaginitis Interactive requested that the Cooperative Learning Center at the University of Minnesota act as an independent outside evaluator in order to assess the Imaginitis Learning System's impact on the development of skills needed for effective and productive cooperative learning, and on the development of strong workplace competencies, such as conflict resolution, as identified by the US Department of Labor. The Cooperative Learning Center has conducted numerous studies on cooperation, team-building, and conflict resolution in the classroom.

This report presents the results of an evaluation of a conflict resolution program in the District of Columbia. The sample consisted of self-contained classrooms which were randomly selected from a total population of approximately 5,000 students. Comparisons were made with control groups whose demographics were similar to those who were given the Imaginitis curriculum. Findings are the result of analysis of measures administered on three occasions during the 1995-96 academic year. Dependent measures were analyzed on a pre-/post-basis. Scheduling of the program's implementation within each respective school district dictated the technique of measurement analysis. Each method offered good opportunities for meaningful analysis.

At all levels of implementation and evaluation assessment, the following was determined: In contrast to students in the comparison classrooms, Imaginitis was observed to contribute significantly to the development of conflict resolution skills within the classroom. Students in the Imaginitis classrooms demonstrated that these skills were sustained over time. Statistically significant findings demonstrated that Imaginitis students developed a stronger ability to resolve conflicts in a non-violent manner and were more inclined to seek the intervention of a third party when settling the conflicts.

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THE IMAGINITIS LEARNING SYSTEM

The Imaginitis Learning System is an integrated product development curriculum which is aimed at achieving stronger cooperation and conflict resolution skills among students who use it at the elementary through adult education levels. It is a performance-based instruction project in which students learn to apply communication skills and work competencies in a "real life" context. It attempts to offer authentic assessment as its students are instructed on how to publish a book that becomes a portfolio exhibition of their learning, while teachers use the assessment to evaluate students' writing, speaking, listening, and collaborating skills. With Imaginitis, teachers "learn by doing". Imaginitis students are given the basis of an age/grade appropriate story to which they add characters and events of their creation (as individuals in their own book and as group members in their class book). Teachers participate in a day-long training session and then implement the program. Each teacher serves as the classroom "coach" who is responsible for assigning students to teams and for keeping the class "scorecard". Imaginitis teachers observe students as they participate in the process. Students have Practice Sessions, which allow for the brainstorming of ideas and exchange of information, and Game Days, during which book parts are constructed through further group discussions and members voting on what should, and should not, be put into the book.

As the group constructs its team book, various individual projects are assessed by other team members. Participants are asked to present their contributions orally as well as

offer individual writing for teammate (peer) review. Each individual is required to submit a contribution to the team product. The groups then plan and implement a publishing party in order to celebrate the achievement and read aloud parts of their books to their classmates, first by being trained in the principles and techniques of the Imaginitis Learning System, which involve thematic instruction and cooperative learning strategies in order to improve student achievement and cooperation, and then by using Imaginitis lesson plans to guide their students through the project. Imaginitis attempts to accommodate students of all ages and ability levels.

THE COOPERATIVE LEARNING CENTER

The Cooperative Learning Center has been a part of the College of Education at the University of Minnesota since 1972. Over the years, the Center has focused on making classrooms more cooperative places and the teaching of cooperative skills (that is, leadership, communication, decision making, trust building, and conflict resolution).

The primary efforts of the Center are Research and Training. The Center has conducted several research studies and a series of extensive reviews of the existing research on cooperation and conflict resolution. To date, The Cooperative Learning Center has conducted or facilitated over 15 studies on Conflict Resolution in educational environments. The Center's directors are Dr. David W. Johnson, professor of Educational Psychology, and Dr. Roger T. Johnson, Professor of Curriculum and Instruction.

Teaching Students to Be Peacemakers

Teaching Students To Be Peacemakers is a K-adult spiral curriculum developed by David and Roger Johnson, which is based on over 50 years of research on conflict resolution, cooperation, and classroom climate. This field-tested program is designed to teach students the appropriate steps of conflict management and negotiation. Students are informed of the need to understand the importance of long-term relationships in a cooperative context. Negotiation steps are taught (I want, I feel, etc.) in order to maximize student ownership of the process. Next, students are instructed on how to mediate conflicts among fellow students who are not able to achieve a mutual understanding and agreement on their own. One of the program's objectives is to teach all students how to manage their conflicts, and how to mediate their classmates' conflicts, so that an atmosphere of cooperation and safety can be continually maintained. Research has proven this program to be an effective tool for achieving conflict resolution and violence prevention in classrooms that have used it. As a result, the *Imaginitis Conflict Resolution Unit* has adopted the *Teaching Students To Be Peacemakers* curriculum for its project-learning framework.

IMAGINITIS AND THE COOPERATIVE LEARNING CENTER

During the academic years 1994-95, 1995-96, and 1996-97 the Cooperative Learning Center at the University of Minnesota has acted as an independent outside evaluator to assess the impact *Imaginitis* has had on team-building and conflict resolution within the classroom. The first year's evaluation focused on cooperation and classroom climate. Results demonstrated that Imaginitis had an overwhelmingly

positive impact on classrooms that used it. When Imaginitis was asked to submit a pilot-test conflict resolution program to the District of Columbia in September 1995, the Cooperative Learning Center was asked to evaluate its impact during that school year as well.

At all grade levels evaluated (Grades 3-12), results revealed that in contrast to control classrooms, the *Imaginitis* program was observed to contribute significantly to team-building and conflict resolution within the classroom. No such effects were noticed in the non-Imaginitis classrooms. Students demonstrated that these skills were sustained over time. In addition, development of stronger conflict resolution skills was observed as statistically significant findings demonstrated that Imaginitis students developed a stronger ability to resolve conflicts in a non-violent manner, and were more inclined to promote an atmosphere of safety and cooperation long after the program was completed.

The Instrument

The instrument used to measure differences as they relate to Imaginitis and non-Imaginitis classrooms is comprised of a word-association exercise form called What Conflict Means To Me. Students are asked to spontaneously respond to the word *conflict* with words that they immediately think of as a result of hearing the word *conflict*. The other part of the conflict resolution component, the Conflict Report Form, asks subjects to write about a conflict they have recently experienced. Subjects are asked to describe the situation : "Who was the conflict with, how do you know that person, what was the conflict about, what happened/ how did it get handled, and how did you feel about it when

it was over?". Responses are then coded on a numerical basis from a scale of 1 to 6, as the responses relate to physically forcing one's will or opinion on the other person (1), verbally forcing one's will or opinion on the other person (2) withdrawing from the conflict altogether and sacrificing any vested interest in the matter (3), getting an adult to help solve the problem (4), attempting to problem - solve quickly without a great deal of thought (5), and entering into a fully-negotiated settlement in which both sides agree to honor the agreement they have reached (6).

Method

The Project Director, a Ph.D. candidate from the Cooperative Learning Center, visited classrooms in selected sites throughout the school year. The same dependent measure was administered on three different occasions in order to assess pre-measure, post-measure, and longitudinal analysis of the Imaginitis Learning System's impact. The Project Director had full control of the data at all times, and was solely responsible for its collection. Upon each visit, the Project Director would inform all class members of the importance of their responses and that their responses would be kept strictly confidential, with only the Project Director seeing them. Subjects were then instructed on how to complete the dependent measure. Each administration of the entire evaluation instrument took approximately 40 minutes to complete. The completed instruments were then collected by the Project Director, and brought back to a locked file at The Cooperative Learning Center. Data were compiled and analyzed and any

change which resulted from each different administration of the evaluation instrument was noted.

Imaginitis and District of Columbia School Teachers

Teachers and students in the District benefited greatly from the program's focus on teacher training and support. Teachers observed that competition among students was de-emphasized and cooperation among group members was enhanced. Assessment was authentic because students were taught a genuine "real-life" work experience in which products were developed, books were completed and displayed, and accomplishments were celebrated through a planned event instead of by the awarding of grades.

Teachers also enjoyed using the Imaginitis Learning System because they were able to observe and participate in the process and integrate information and related skills into their teaching.

The District of Columbia Public School System believes that such skills as decision-making, critical thinking, and problem solving are essential for students who hope to achieve in the 21st century; however, most norm-referenced, standardized tests fail to provide a completely adequate measure of these skills. Teachers in the District found the *Imaginitis* system easy to use in terms of identifying critical thinking skill development by observing the group decision-making and voting process, by having every student learn to assess their work, and by noting student reflections in their individual books. Exemplary work was also available to students who could observe the work of others which reflected

high standards so that they could model their efforts accordingly. Teachers felt that making the students aware of the standards and expectations was a valuable teaching tool.

Catherine Cannery, a teacher at the Roper Middle School referred to Imaginitis as "a good hands-on effective program ...which enhanced self-esteem." Betty Kelly, of Malcom X Elementary, felt that her students were allowed to "work cooperatively, to express ideas, and learn that what everyone else said was important as they learned strategies for peer mediation." Yvonne Lewis, Principal of Stuart-Hobson Middle School, felt that Imaginitis "allowed children to explore controversial issues and arrive at conflict resolutions in a fun and creative way."

Results

A straight F-test was used to analyze results from the three rounds of observations at each site. Observed results for the evaluation of the implementation of Imaginitis within the District of Columbia will demonstrate findings for the **Conflict Resolution Component** of the Imaginitis Learning System.

Responses are coded on a numerical basis from a scale of 1 to 6, as the responses relate to physically forcing one's will or opinion on the other person (1), verbally forcing one's will or opinion on the other person (2) withdrawing from the conflict altogether and sacrificing any vested interest in the matter (3), getting an adult to help solve the problem (4), attempting to problem - solve quickly without a great deal of thought (5), and entering into a fully-negotiated settlement in which both sides agree to honor the agreement they have reached (6).

Students in the Imaginitis classes changed their responses to a much stronger degree over the four-month implementation of the Conflict Resolution Unit than did their non-Imaginitis counterparts. Longitudinal assessment offered similar sustainable findings

A) Imaginitis Students Grade 3/4 ***denotes statistical significance**

SOURCE	DF	SS	MS	F	p
Factor	2	8.211	4.105	4.24	< .01*
Error	111	107.47	0.968		
TOTAL	113	115.68			
	N	MEAN	SD		
First	38	4.6842	1.0681		
Second	38	5.3158	1.1704		
Third	38	5.1579	0.9456		

B) Non-Imaginitis Students Grade 3/4

SOURCE	DF	SS	MS	F	p
Factor	2	8.133	4.067	4.16 (neg.)	< .01* neg
Error	102	99.714	0.978		
TOTAL	104	107.848			
	N	MEAN	SD		
First	35	4.0857	0.8179		
Second	35	3.4286	1.1704		
Third	35	3.6000	0.9456		

C) Imaginitis Students Grade 7

SOURCE	DF	SS	MS	F	p
Factor	2	43.30	21.65	20.13	< .01*
Error	57	61.30	1.08		
TOTAL	59	104.60			
	N	MEAN	SD		
First	20	4.100	1.252		
Second	20	5.950	0.759		
Third	20	5.850	1.040		

D) Non-Imaginitis Students Grade 7

SOURCE	DF	SS	MS	F	p
Factor	2	3.23	1.62	1.32	0.275
Error	57	69.75	1.22		
TOTAL	59	72.98			
	N	MEAN	SD		
First	20	3.450	0.759		
Second	20	4.000	1.170		
Third	20	3.600	1.314		

E) Imaginitis Students Grade 11/12

SOURCE	DF	SS	MS	F	p
Factor	2	25.63	12.82	8.63	< .01*
Error	57	84.70	1.49		
TOTAL	59	110.33			
	N	MEAN	SD		
First	20	2.350	0.671		
Second	20	3.200	1.056		
Third	20	3.950	1.701		

F) Non-Imaginitis Students Grade 11/12

SOURCE	DF	SS	MS	F	p
Factor	2	0.903	0.467	0.60	0.550
Error	57	44.050	0.773		
TOTAL	59	44.983			
	N	MEAN	SD		
First	20	3.1500	0.8127		
Second	20	3.3500	0.9333		
Third	20	3.4500	0.8870		

DISCUSSION

A pure and true educational research evaluation would consist of many components, including: complete randomization and stratification of all subject participants, daily observations and administrations of measures by the evaluator, and a second independent evaluator to conduct a similar evaluation in order to assess differences between the two. As is the case in many, if not almost all educational evaluations, these demands cannot be

met; however, this evaluation was accomplished in a fair and objective fashion, and follows the criteria and norms of several evaluations which have preceded it. Findings are as true as they possibly can be, given the circumstances.

It is reasonable to assume that the Imaginitis students at the elementary, middle, and high school levels benefited greatly in following area of achievement as it relates to conflict definition and resolution. Students who were involved in the Imaginitis Conflict Resolution Unit learned how to collaborate more effectively with their classmates. Imaginitis students related anecdotal observations of strategies they used to resolve conflicts. These strategies were recollected in the real-life conflict portrayals of the Imaginitis students. Hence, many Imaginitis students demonstrated a transfer of learned conflict- management skills from the classroom to their daily life experiences.

It is recommended that this curriculum be continually implemented so that the strategies may become over-learned by the students. More teachers should be trained in the Imaginitis Learning System so that more students may learn to develop skills that this program has proven to foster. The Conflict Resolution Program could be more effective if it was complemented by a formal training of both teachers and students in how to negotiate and manage conflict. Teachers need to be more fully-trained so that the Imaginitis Conflict Resolution Program's effectiveness might be fully maximized. On its own, it is still a very effective and constructive tool which helps teach students how to manage and negotiate conflicts more effectively. Continued evaluation of the curriculum is suggested.

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